



2014 Conservation Report: Innovations Protect Wisconsin's Land and Waters

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Media Contact:

Donna Gilson

608-224-5130 donna.gilson@wi.gov

Bill Cosh, Communications Director

608-224-5020 William2.Cosh@wi.gov

MADISON – Ever since Wisconsin's Coon Valley served as a laboratory for research into preventing water erosion in the 1930s, Wisconsin has been a conservation innovator, a point made in the newest edition of the Wisconsin Land and Water Annual Progress Report. The report details innovative solutions to conservation problems, from Waushara County's sandy soils to Crawford County's steep hills.

Along with innovations in conservation, this year's report also highlights the strong partnerships among state, federal and local agencies working on conservation. As the report's introduction notes, such cooperation would in itself represent a major innovation in some states where staff in different agencies don't even know one another.

The report was presented to the Land and Water Conservation Board today at its regular meeting and is now available online at <http://datcp.wi.gov/uploads/Environment/pdf/LandWaterAnnualReport2014.pdf>. It is a joint effort of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Conservation efforts in Wisconsin are a cooperative effort involving landowners working with DATCP and DNR, as well as the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, county conservation departments, and nongovernmental agencies. The report includes tables listing the many projects undertaken or completed in 2014.

The report features success stories, focusing on projects outside the usual scope of protecting the state's cropland and waters. These stories include:

Dane and Green counties – Working with The Nature Conservancy and with private foundation funding added to public and landowner funds, government conservation agencies and the University of Wisconsin set up an experiment in "precision conservation." Instead of making a program available and waiting for farmers to come to them, which has been the traditional model, they approached farmers whose operations were in areas contributing most of the runoff. The results of the Pleasant Valley Watershed Project showed some dramatic reductions in phosphorus and sediment runoff.

Crawford County – Cover crops are gaining new respect as a way to keep soil and nutrients where they belong, but in steep terrain like that in Crawford County, where they're most needed, planting cover crops can be problematic. The county and the local USDA conservationist brainstormed, and hit on the idea of scattering seed mixes by plane. A happy side effect was that the cover crops also helped with weed control. The report also details cover crop projects in **Green, Sauk and Pepin** counties.

Shawano County – Where farming and fishing are equally important, agricultural runoff is a particularly hot issue. So when an angler saw manure entering the Embarrass River, he called the Department of Natural Resources and set a multi-year project in motion. What started off as an enforcement action turned into a search for short- and long-term solutions to one farm's runoff problems. The project, which spanned a change of ownership, stands as a model of how to build relationships that lead to protecting resources and satisfied farmers in a situation that might have been all punishment and no solution.

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CONSERVATION—ADD ONE

Waushara County – Two generations have worked with conservation agencies on the farm now owned by John and Christine Lauritzen but previously owned by her father. Along with its sandy soils, prone to both wind and water erosion, the farm is surrounded by wetlands, a private lake, and a tributary of the Pine River. The Lauritzens wanted to keep land in farming, but return it to the way it used to be, and that included providing wildlife habitat, too. Their county conservationist brought in the Central Wisconsin Windshed Partnership Group, a consortium of regional conservation agencies. Four miles of trees that will grow into a windbreak resulted, protecting the land for the next generations of the Lauritzen family while keeping that sandy soil out of the surrounding waters.

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